

# 15<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL COAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE

Over 100 educators from across the state attended the 15th Annual Coal Education Conference June 19-22, 2012, at the Rend Lake Resort and Conference Center in Whittington, Illinois. The goal of the conference is to give teachers the knowledge and learning tools to incorporate into their lesson plans coal education, from mining to electric power generation, as well as other uses of coal. After participating in the conference, the hope is that teachers will have gained greater understanding of and respect of coal, the Illinois coal industry and the industry's environmental and economic impact on mining regions of the state.

The four-day conference included lectures, tours and hands-on activities correlated to the Illinois Learning Standards. The presenters were experts in their fields and conveyed their enthusiasm of their profession to the teachers. The break-out session topics gave the teachers comprehensive information on coal formation/geology, the economics of coal, coal to electricity, carbon sequestration and other clean coal technologies, careers in mining, coal mine permitting and environmental protection, past and present surface mining and reclamation, underground mining, mine safety/ventilation, handling and use of coal byproducts, and state science standards.



The conference opened with Rob Finley, director of the Advanced Energy Technology Initiative at the Illinois State Geological Survey, speaking to the teachers of the important role coal plays in Illinois energy portfolio.

On the second day of the conference, the teachers boarded four buses for group tours, visiting an underground mine, a surface mine and a power plant using clean coal technology and fueled by Illinois coal. Underground tours were hosted by Prairie State

Energy Campus, Marissa; Mach Mining-Pond Creek Mine, Johnston City; M-Class Mine, Macedonia, and Prairie Eagle Mine, Cutler. Teachers received required safety training before going underground. They were taken to the working face and saw first-hand the underground mining process.

Surface mines Red Hawk, near Cutler, and the Cottage Grove complex near Equality, also interrupted their work day to accommodate the tours. Before the tour, the teachers received the required safety training. From their buses, the teachers were able to see how coal is removed and how the land is reclaimed once the coal is extracted.

Prairie State Energy Campus in Marissa, Southern Illinois Power Cooperative in Marion and Southern Illinois University Power Plant in Carbondale devoted the day to the teachers, giving them an extensive tour of the power facilities and explaining how clean coal technology allows them to burn Illinois coal.



On Thursday, Dr. Lizanne DeStefano, director of the I-STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) Education Initiative, spoke to the teachers about the evaluation and sustainability of innovative programs. Thursday evening, former coal miner, Evan Sink gave a photo presentation of coal mining techniques from the Turn of the Century through the 1970s.

Teachers spent part of their final day at the conference touring the Rend Lake College Coal Miner Training Center, which provides training for new coal miners and refresher training for experienced miners. The facility includes a 10,000-square-foot simulated mine and a live fire training facility.

During the learning standards lesson sessions that followed, the teacher facilitators, through hands-on activities, demonstrated how the coal information received during the conference and their first-hand experiences on the tours received could be incorporated into teaching plans. By including coal education in their classrooms, teachers bring to their students and communities an awareness of one of the state's greatest natural resources and the positive role coal plays in day-to-day lives and the economy of the state.

As an Authorized Provider of Professional Development through the Illinois State Board of Education, the Office of Coal Development offered 28 Continuing Professional Development Units to teachers who attended all the conference sessions.

At the close of the conference, teacher evaluations were completed. The following are some highlights:

